

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 130 543

FL 008 179

AUTHOR Tway, Patricia
TITLE Speech Differences of Factory Worker Age Groups.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 11p.
JOURNAL CIT Studies in Linguistics; v25 p63-72 1975

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Age Differences; Age Groups; Community Characteristics; *Industrial Personnel; Job Satisfaction; Laborers; Language Patterns; *Language Research; Language Usage; Social Behavior; Social Characteristics; *Speech Evaluation; *Speech Habits; Standard Spoken Usage; *Work Attitudes

ABSTRACT

This article, which focuses on speech differences of age groups, is part of a larger study of occupational jargon, its characteristics and underlying features and the part it plays in reflecting the workers' knowledge of their jobs and their attitudes toward jobs in general. The project incorporated a case method of research in a china factory. The plant was examined as a speech community using personal and participant observations as well as interviews. Informants were selected by seniority category and departmental affiliation; then their social characteristics and the background of the factory and community were explored. A specially structured reading isolated the regional dialect of the informants and a questionnaire, presented in a conversational manner, probed the workers' environments and their definitions of them. Photographs were used to help the workers identify work-related material and to promote free narrative during the interview. The above techniques were used to observe the linguistic and social behavior of people at work and to help formulate operational procedures for future studies of this kind. (Author/CHK)

* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

STUDIES IN LINGUISTICS
Volume 25, 1975

SPEECH DIFFERENCES OF FACTORY WORKER AGE GROUPS¹

Patricia Tway, New Castle, Pennsylvania

[PA6886.816. American English--Language of special classes.]

[The first paragraph may serve as an abstract.]

This article which focuses on speech differences of age groups is part of a larger study of occupational jargon, its characteristics and underlying features and the part it plays in reflecting the workers' knowledge of their jobs and their attitudes toward jobs in general. The project incorporated a case method of research in a china factory.² The plant was examined as a speech community using personal and participant observations as well as interviews. Informants were selected by seniority category and departmental affiliation;³ then their social characteristics and the background of the factory and community were explored. A specially structured reading⁴ isolated the regional dialect of the informants and a questionnaire⁵, presented in a conversational manner, probed the workers' environments and their definitions of them. Photographs were used to help the workers identify work-related material and to promote free narrative during the interview. The above techniques were used to observe the linguistic and social behavior of people at work and to help formulate operational procedures for future studies of this kind.

Comparing the speech forms of workers from different age groups provides an opportunity to study linguistic change over time. No claim is made that this accurately represents a diachronic study of change because comparison is not made between speech forms of the same age level at several points in time but comparison is made of speech forms from a cross section of successive age levels at one point in time.⁶

I am working on the assumption that language as a pattern of behavior acquired at an early age and reinforced while growing to maturity is in some respects relatively stable. I am aware that speakers modify their speech patterns in response to social pressures and that no generation remains isolated from the effects of another; however, I accept a fundamental belief of linguistics that a person's basic speech pattern undergoes little change after the teen years. In this sense speakers reveal their

place of origin and their generation.

The safety of such an assumption is reinforced by the rural nature of New Castle, where the factory is located. The population is more stable than in cosmopolitan areas such as Pittsburgh and Cleveland and there is less tendency to adopt linguistic forms which might be considered more prestigious by city dwellers. The validity of this statement will be demonstrated by the divergent pattern of management men who come from other regions or who travel extensively.

Several other factors permit a generational comparison. The informants are representative of particular age groups in the same place, at the same time,⁷ engaged in the same occupation. In addition, ample information pertaining to the social characteristics of informants is available so that differences in education or family background can be studied in relation to divergent speech forms. The usefulness of such information will be demonstrated later.

We may infer some kind of linguistic change if the percentages of the preferred forms for the older informants in each of four job-sex units such as union women, management women, union men, and management men, differs from those of the younger informants within the same units. The usage pattern of informants in the middle-age range may or may not coalesce with the younger informants. If the distribution pattern is consistent for all but one of the units, probing deeper into the characteristics of the divergent job-sex unit may uncover reasons for the deviant pattern.

We may infer no linguistic change is taking place if the percentages of the preferred forms for the older informants in each of the job-sex units is the same as those of the younger informants within the same units. If change is evident in one or two of the job-sex units a comparison of other social characteristics may succeed in bringing to light important differences. For example, social, economic, or educational differences may account for the usage pattern.

The following tables based upon key words from the reading illustrate the apparent change or stable nature of forms between age groups. Although percentages for preferred forms are not identical, the differences are of degree not of kind.

Several regional forms⁸ shown in Table 1 appear to be stable between age groups, the intrusive [r] in wash, high checked [i] in creek, and trisyllabic

['lai,bEri] for library. Most older workers in all units exhibited intrusive [r] in wash. The two older union women who did not, included a woman who prided herself on her diction because her son "is a doctor of psychology" and a Black woman who "tries to speak distinctly". Six younger union workers, half of whom attended college, did not exhibit intrusive [r]; however, younger management men did, which may be due to their western regional backgrounds that favor the intrusive [r] form.

The usage pattern for standard [i] rather than northern [I] in creek indicates relative stability for the form. The slight progressive increase of the [i] form for younger informants is accounted for by the social characteristics of the informants who used the [I] form. All of the latter informants shared one or more of the following characteristics: family origin or education northeast of the region, education in Shenango township on the east side of New Castle, or education in one of two New Castle parochial schools whose teaching nuns were educated in mother houses east of the region. What might at first glance appear to be generational change may be the reflection of the educational background of some informants. Kurath's map⁹ shows that New Castle is located on the southwestern edge of the [I] boundary.

The regional usage pattern for library as trisyllabic ['laɪbEri] also appears to be stable. Only eleven informants used a different form and over half of those informants were management men. The two older union women who did not follow the pattern were the same two informants who did not exhibit intrusive [r] in wash. The two younger union men who did not follow the pattern were those who had attended college. Management men whose usage pattern was different had grown up or completed college outside the region.

Several forms show a change in pronunciation between age groups which is illustrated by Table 2. The voiced alveolar stop with glottal constriction [d] in didn't changes to voiceless alveolar stop with glottal stop release [tʔ]. The final voiceless velar stop [k] as in dusk gives way to voiceless alveolar stop [t]. The back vowel [o̞] as in swollen is replaced by mid [ʌ]. And the velar nasal combination [ɪŋ] as in doing changes to an alveolar nasal plus high front vowel [ɪn].

Preference for the alveolar voiceless stop plus glottal closure in place of the voiced alveolar stop with glottal constriction [d] in didn't

is evident with younger speakers and the trend is indicated by the distribution of the middle-aged speakers.

The usage pattern of [t] as a replacement for [k] in word final position of dusk is evident with younger speakers and is also indicated by the usage pattern for the middle-aged group.

The change from back vowel [ɔ̃] to mid vowel [ʌ] in swollen points to the vowel centralizing tendency of younger speakers in the New Castle area and the influence of post-vocalic /l/.¹⁰

The preference of younger workers is for alveolar nasal and higher vowel [in] in doing. There is also the articulatory habit of replacing velar nasal with alveolar nasal in other forms such as [lɛnθ] and [strɛnθ] for length and strength.

The above discussion describes the speech differences for the age groups of union women, management women, and union men, but it does not describe the usage pattern for management men. The preferred forms for didn't and dusk are generally stable between age groups in the male management job-sex unit. The increase in percentages for the younger group in their use of voiceless alveolar stop plus glottal closure [tʔ] rather than voiced [d] with glottal constriction in didn't and voiceless alveolar stop for velar stop in dusk follows the general trend mentioned above but does not indicate that change has occurred.

The preferred forms for swollen and doing are also generally stable; however, the distribution of percentages is reversed from that described above. Forms such as [ɔ̃] in swollen and [ɪŋ] in doing increase for the younger age group, which does not follow the trend of the other three job-sex units. Pressures from social needs outside the area and non-regional speech habits undoubtedly influence the trend.

The divergent pattern for the male management unit necessitates a consideration of the social characteristics of that unit. Management men, in general, differ most from the other job-sex units in family origin and background, geographic stability, education, neighborhood, and, to a lesser extent, ethnic affiliation. These characteristics have several effects on linguistic behavior. The non-local informants bring their own speech habits to the community, and if there is no significant social pressure forcing them to adopt native forms, they will exhibit forms associated with their own regional background or forms associated with their educational and socio-economic

activities.

Management women share several distinctive features with union men and union women, such as family origin, geographic stability, education, and ethnic affiliation. Since management men and women share characteristics, such as neighborhood and management affiliation, these two characteristics in themselves cannot be taken as important indicators of linguistic behavior.

The form [uj] as in ruined, illustrated by Table 3, was preferred by women and the form [u^ə] was preferred by men. Their usage shows the tendency of women to use a form of hyper-correction in careful speech. The feature was most noticeable in the speech pattern of younger union women. Older management women were observed using the [u^ə] form; however, the limitation imposed by the single informant for that age group did not permit showing a generational change from [u^ə] to [uj].

The phonological variants of began, also shown in Table 3, indicate that usage is changing between age groups; however, the usage pattern presents an ambiguous picture. The preferred form for all age groups of management men and women was [æ], except for the older management woman who used [ɪ]. The union men and women differed in their usage. Older informants showed a higher percentage for [æ]; however, both forms [æ] and [E] were equally preferred by younger union men while younger union women were divided in usage between [E] and [ɪ]. The shared educational and non-local characteristics of younger union men and management men, and the additional education of some young management women served as indicators of their awareness of the grammatical implications of began. The percentage of [æ] usage was greater for both management men and women than for younger union men. However, older management men who shared education, family origin, and neighborhood affiliation with union workers showed the smallest percentage for the [æ] form.

The above material illustrates the importance of comparing the speech forms of different age groups. The social significance of those forms is more clearly defined by the distributional differences between the groups.

FOOTNOTES

¹This paper is a partial result of research done as a Maxwell Fellow for the Department of Anthropology at Syracuse University.

²Fieldwork was conducted over a period of one year at Shenango Pottery of New Castle, Pennsylvania.

³Seniority category refers to the plant seniority of individuals. Category I represents 0-8 years; Category II 9-19 years; and Category III 20-26 years. The categories represent three basic age groups. Departmental affiliation refers to particular work areas within the plant.

⁴The reading was a short paragraph in story form which contained words that help to identify a Western Pennsylvania speaker.

⁵The questionnaire was comprised of three sections. The first section focused on work at the factory level to learn about items and processes in the plant. Another section focused on activities at the departmental level to learn more about the effects of groups and worker mobility on factory jargon. The final section focused on goals and personal definitions of work.

⁶For a more complete discussion of this technique of linguistic analysis see Labov 1966:319.

⁷The interviews were conducted within a six week period.

⁸For a complete analysis of the regional dialect see Kurath and McDavid, 1961.

⁹See Kurath and McDavid 1961:#148.

¹⁰For a discussion of the New Castle /l/ see Davis 1972.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Beynon, H., and Blackburn, R.M.

1972 Perceptions of work (London, Cambridge University Press).

Davis, Lawrence M. (ed.)

1972 Studies in linguistics in honor of Raven I. McDavid, Jr. (University of Alabama Press).

Fishman, Joshua A. (ed.)

1970 Readings in the sociology of language (The Hague: Mouton).

Gumperz, John; and Dell Hymes (eds.)

1972 Directions in sociolinguistics (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston).

Kurath, Hans; and Raven I. McDavid

1961 The pronunciation of English in the Atlantic states (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan press).

Labov, William

1966 The social stratification of English in New York City (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics).

Lehman, Winfred

1962 Historical linguistics (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston).

Snuy, Roger W.; W.A. Wolfram, and W.K. Riley

1968 Field Techniques in an Urban Language Study (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics).

Table 1
 GENERATIONAL VARIATION
 Stable Forms

Sex	Sr.	wash				creek				library			
		[r ~ Q]				[i ~ I]				[Eri ~ rEri]			
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Women Union	I	13	100	-	-	11	85	2	15	13	100	-	-
	II	4	80	1	20	4	80	1	20	5	100	-	-
	III	13	93	1	7	11	79	3	21	12	86	2	14
Women Mang.	I	3	100	-	-	3	100	-	-	3	100	-	-
	II	4	100	-	-	3	75	1	25	4	100	-	-
	III	-	-	1	100	-	-	1	100	1	100	-	-
Men Union	I	12	67	6	33	16	89	2	11	15	89	2	11
	II	22	88	3	12	19	76	6	24	25	100	-	-
	III	25	89	3	11	16	57	12	43	28	100	-	-
Men Mang.	I	9	90	1	10	8	80	2	20	7	70	3	30
	II	5	100	-	-	5	100	-	-	5	100	-	-
	III	20	80	5	20	16	64	9	36	21	84	4	16

The above table illustrates the use of [waš], [waš̃], [krik], [krik], ['laipEri] and ['laiprEri] by the major groups and seniority categories.

SUMMARY OF GENERATIONAL VARIATION
 Stable Forms

Sr.	wash				creek				library			
	[r ~ Q]				[i ~ I]				[Eri ~ rEri]			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
I	37	84	7	16	58	86	6	14	39	87	5	11
II	35	88	4	10	31	79	8	21	39	100	-	-
III	58	85	10	15	43	63	25	37	62	91	6	9

The above table is a summary of the usage pattern by the three seniority categories.

Table 2
 GENERATIONAL VARIATION
 Forms That Change

Sex	Sr.	didn't						dusk			swollen						doing						
		d		t		f		k		t		o		o		o		In		in		en	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Women Union	I	4	37	7	54	2	15	5	38	8	62	1	8	4	37	8	62	5	38	7	54	1	8
	II	3	60	2	40	-	-	2	40	3	60	1	20	3	60	1	20	4	80	1	20	-	-
	III	9	64	4	29	1	7	9	64	5	36	9	64	4	29	1	7	11	79	1	7	2	14
Women Mang.	I	1	33	2	67	-	-	1	33	2	67	-	-	2	67	1	33	2	67	1	33	-	-
	II	3	75	1	25	-	-	2	50	2	50	3	75	-	-	1	25	2	50	2	50	-	-
	III	1	100	-	-	-	-	1	100	-	-	1	100	-	-	-	-	1	100	-	-	-	-
Men Union	I	7	39	9	50	2	11	7	39	11	61	4	22	4	22	10	56	10	56	7	39	1	5
	II	14	56	11	44	-	-	15	60	10	40	6	24	11	44	8	32	19	76	3	12	3	12
	III	23	82	4	14	1	4	20	71	8	26	16	57	9	32	3	11	23	82	2	7	3	11
Men Mang.	I	9	90	1	10	-	-	6	60	4	40	7	70	2	20	1	10	9	90	1	10	-	-
	II	5	100	-	-	-	-	1	20	4	80	3	60	1	20	1	20	5	100	-	-	-	-
	III	23	92	2	8	-	-	20	80	5	20	12	48	9	36	4	16	21	84	1	4	-	-

The above table illustrates the use of [dɪdnt], [dɪt'nt], [dɪrnt], [dusk], [dust], [swɔ'yn], [swɔ'yn], [sway'n], [duɪn], [duɪn] and [duen] by the major groups and seniority categories.

Table 3
GENERATIONAL VARIATION

Sex	Sr.	ruined				began					
		[u ⁱ ~ u ^a]				[E ~ I ~ a]					
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	I	7	54	6	46	6	46	6	46	1	8
	II	-	-	5	100	1	20	2	40	2	40
	III	3	21	11	79	13	93	1	7	-	-
	I	2	67	1	33	-	-	-	-	3	100
	II	2	50	2	50	1	25	-	-	3	75
	III	1	100	-	-	-	-	1	100	-	-
	I	2	11	16	89	8	44	2	11	8	44
	II	1	4	24	96	7	28	4	16	14	56
	III	3	11	25	89	16	57	5	18	7	25
	I	-	-	10	100	-	-	-	-	10	100
	II	-	-	5	100	1	20	-	-	4	80
	III	-	-	25	100	2	8	4	16	19	76

The above table illustrates the use of [rUind], [rUend], [bigEn], [bigIn] and [bigan] by the major groups and seniority categories.

SUMMARY OF GENERATIONAL VARIATION

Sr.	ruined				began					
	[u ⁱ ~ u ^a]				[E ~ I ~ a]					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
I	11	25	33	75	14	32	8	18	22	50
II	3	8	36	92	10	26	6	15	23	59
III	7	10	61	90	31	46	11	16	26	38

The above table is a summary of the usage pattern of the three seniority categories.